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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER KINGIBE SEES A CRITICAL PERIOD IN THE CONGOLESE PEACE PROCESS

¶11. (C) Summary: During a November 4 encounter, former Foreign Minister and informal peace process advisor Baba Gana Kingibe told Polcouns that last month's Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) derailed primarily because of Kabila government duplicity. The next ICD would not take place until January. Kingibe worried that, during the interregnum, the Congolese rivals would spend too much time flexing their muscles and seeking military advantage. Kingibe claimed Kagame and Museveni were malefactors in this process, contributing not only to the martial air in the Congo, but inching closer to an imprudent collision themselves. Kingibe believed it incumbent on Nigeria, the U.S. and other nations to pressure Kabila, the major faction leaders, Kagame and Museveni to focus attention on the issues of peace instead of grasping for balance of power advantages on the ground. End Summary.

Inter-Congolese Dialogue - A Stalling Game

¶12. (C) The October Inter-Congolese Dialogue in Addis was handicapped by several factors, Kingibe noted. Lack of funding was a problem. Western donors pledged money but actual funding was late or did not come at all. This short-fall inhibited the ability to pay for the travel and lodging of all participants; because of the funding gap, the conference got off to a bad start and could never regain momentum. African mediators, nonetheless, pushed the conference forward, fearing that delay would send the wrong signal to the international community and undermine donor confidence in the peace process. Kingibe also felt that Masire had not done sufficient preparatory work with the major Congolese participants to make sure the conference would yield results.

¶13. (C) Despite these problems, the conference might have succeeded but for Kabila government duplicity. During earlier stages of conference planning, Kinshasa wanted a truncated ICD, gathering only the major faction leaders and a few prominent representatives from civil society. At the eleventh hour, however, Kabila's people did an abrupt volte-face. The DROC security chief, who headed the delegation, insisted that the Addis session only deal with procedural or technical issues since all Congolese groups, large and small, were not present. The Kabila team argued that substantive discussions would be futile during an abbreviated session, since the participants would have to rehash the same issues once a more inclusive ICD took place.

¶14. (C) By the time more participants arrived, the Kabila team simply began to stonewall, according to Kingibe. Their change on the conference make-up was a willful dilatory tactic. Kinshasa had asked them to stall because it was expecting a large shipment of military equipment (helicopters from France and weapons from China.) Kabila planned to arm the Mai Mai "to the teeth" and dangle the promise of weapons in front of factional warlord Mbusa, Kingibe stated. Once the team in Addis received word the equipment had arrived, they closed their briefcases and essentially deep-sixed the ICD. The Kabila team believed the new arms would shift the power balance, opening the door for them to win by force concessions they could not then obtain at the negotiating table.

The Game of Shifting Alliances

¶15. (C) Kingibe rued the unsatisfactory ending of the ICD. While some talked of holding the next session in November, Masire told him that time was required to pick up the pieces. Masire did not contemplate another meeting until January, particularly since that session had to be universal in

attendance. While the Facilitator would be slogging through the tedium of conference planning, the Congolese factions would be counting their weapons and looking to acquire more real estate to exchange for more favorable political concessions later, Kingibe predicted.

16. (C) While all the parties agreed that Kabila could remain as a caretaker President, they also wanted to maximize their positions in the interim government and, thus, situate themselves for subsequent elections. Waxing philosophical, Kingibe said that "Where you are in the afternoon, and how fast you travel, will dictate where you rest in the evening. Ultimately, all the faction leaders wanted to rest in the biggest bed in the Presidential palace." Kingibe lamented that the power-oriented focus of the Congolese leaders might far outweigh Masire's ability to push the peace process by himself.

17. (C) Adding Nigeria's confirmation to what we have learned, Kingibe stated that Kabila and Museveni had struck a deal, rendering Kagame the odd-man-out. The deal was good for Kabila because it lessened the heat from Kampala. As a by-product of the deal and of recent arms shipments, Kabila resupplied the Mai Mai. Kabila and Museveni were also enticing Mbusa. Meanwhile, Kagame has not been sitting idle himself. He has brought Bemba's MLC and Onusumba's RDC-G closer to him. He too is courting Mbusa, who, according to Kingibe, is relishing his "nonaligned" role and concomitant ability to pit both sides in a bidding war for his hand in a marriage of convenience.

Meddling Neighbors

18. (C) Kingibe chastised Kagame and, to a greater extent, Museveni for the irksome role they are playing in the Congo. Kingibe thought Kagame's intervention was more understandable than Museveni's, given the presence of the FAR and Interahamwe and the tragedy that was Rwanda a few years ago. Museveni, on the other hand, had let the scope of his ambition exceed his sense of proportion and Uganda's national interests. Moreover, several Ugandan generals were profiting from illicit trafficking in Eastern Congo. These mercantile officers encouraged Museveni's over-extension in the Congo to perpetuate their enrichment, Kingibe offered. On a lesser level, Zimbabwe still remained engaged despite its internal woes. Kabila's Justice Minister, Kingibe pointed out, was close to several Zimbabwean leaders, including Mugabe. Because these Zimbabweans were making money in the Congo, they would come to the aid of Kabila, politically and even militarily, to the extent they could. Kingibe dismissed Angola as progressively disinterested and dwindling in importance.

Raising the Problem of Peace

19. (C) Kingibe believed that preventing major slippage in the peace process during the IDC hiatus would require skilled diplomacy. While not costing much materially, nations claiming to support the Congolese peace process must demonstrate political will at this time. Given the major actors' proclivity for military diversions, he contended a sustained diplomatic effort was needed to keep the issues of peace on the front burner and to prevent the Congolese actors from tinkering too heavily with the balance of power on the ground. Every hour you force them to discuss peace is one less hour they can play at war, Kingibe declared. Kingibe's strategy included:

-- Pressuring Kagame and Museveni to play more positive roles and not use the Congo as a proxy for bilateral power plays. They must discourage the armed groups within their spheres of influence from an escalation of hostilities.

-- Urging Masire to travel the region to discuss with all key players the issues for the next ICD and solicit their views.

-- Encourage the Zambian government to hold a senior-level conference in December to review progress on implementing the Lusaka Accord.

Kingibe thought these efforts would help moderate the players while filling in time until the ICP could resume. Kingibe

also felt the USG could best use its diplomatic weight to encourage Museveni and Kagame to behave better. For its part, Nigeria was arranging a meeting in Abuja of the Kabilia, Bemba, Onusumba trio as soon as their travel schedules coincide.

Comment

¶10. (C) Kingibe confirmed, from the Nigerian perspective, much of what we already knew. It is helpful to know that Abuja views events in the Congo much the same as we do. Kingibe's assessment that the ICD hiatus might invite a period of heightened adventurism bears attention. Some diplomatic pressure at this juncture may be worthwhile to prevent a slide in the peace process. End comment.

Jeter